

Unit vital to OIF medical evac mission

BALAD AIR BASE, Iraq — The medical mission in Iraq is complex, made up of a variety of military units that provide care for servicemembers and Department of Defense civilians and contractors who need help with various ailments.

But patients who need long-term treatment at hospitals outside Iraq depend on a single facility, part of the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group, to get them to the Contingency Aero-medical Staging Facility.

The facility, a medical passenger terminal of sorts, is the last stop in Iraq for patients traveling to Kuwait or Germany for medical treatment. Lt. Col.

John R. Ewing, from the 759th Surgical Operations Squadron at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, took command of the facility in January.

"[We] provide nursing and medical care to patients while they await their airlift mission," he explained, "ensuring they are medically and administratively prepared for their flights."

That mission keeps the facility staff busy 24 hours a day — either caring for

those on their way out, or preparing for the next group of patients — moving an average of 175 people each week.

"It's important that they see we are taking good care of them and we value their contribution and the sacrifices they've made here," the colonel said. "I think our staff does very well at making sure these people are taken care of."

Their efforts don't go unnoticed; "They are outstanding," said **Jeff Pall**, a contractor who was injured in a mortar attack. "Being a civilian who once served in the Army, I have to say the [medical care] has come a long way."

Army Sgt. **Roger Hammonds** agreed with Mr. Pall. The sergeant, a member of the Texas Army National Guard, who was serving as a convoy gunner here, was injured when a roadside bomb exploded as his convoy drove near Al Taqaddum in central Iraq.

"They've kept me happy," the sergeant said. "I have no complaints. They provide better medical care than I've ever had back in the States."

Colonel Ewing also heaped praise on

volunteers who regularly take their off-duty time to care for patients.

"Volunteers are a huge part of what we do here," he said. "In fact, I don't think we could do the mission as expeditiously without them."

A casual observer at the facility may say the staff and volunteers are doing "God's work" by providing care for the wounded from Operation Iraqi Freedom, but Colonel Ewing said the folks are just doing what they're trained to do.

"In the greater sense, we're all doing God's work here," the colonel said. "But most medics would be demur and say 'I'm just doing what I was trained to do.' We are in a position to preserve life and function and help these folks who have been injured return to a normal life, or as close as possible to normal, dependent on their injuries. We're here simply to provide the best care we can and to help them get home as soon as possible."

*Tech. Sgt. Marc Barnes
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing
Public Affairs*

by Tech. Sgt. Marc Barnes



Staff Sgt. Misty Varner, a medical technician in the Contingency Aeromedical Staging Facility, offers patients their choice of movies at the Combat Aeromedical Staging Facility in January. Sergeant Varner and

other medical professionals work to make patients' stays at the facility as comfortable as possible. Sergeant Varner is deployed to Balad from the 759th Medical Operations Squadron at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.